

# The Free Church Educational Scheme

## 1843-50

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IN the 1820's, and more particularly in the 1830's, the parochial school system of Scotland and the burgh schools came under searching critical review, consequent on the publication of a number of statistical reports relating to the provision for education throughout Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> The evidence in these reports at once provided a shock to those who had thus far retained a complacent view of the adequacy and efficiency of Scottish schools and also much support for those who had for some time complained to their countrymen about the increasingly insufficient provision for national education. An illuminating summary view of the situation was provided in 1836 by an Englishman, Frederic Hill, who had spent some time in Scotland as an inspector of prisons :

" There can be no doubt that in Scotland the rural population [i.e., excluding the Highlands], at least, is much better educated than the same class in England ; though it must be admitted that neither the amount of instruction given nor the number of recipients justifies the opinion usually entertained on the subject in this country [England]. As respects the urban population, we doubt whether our Northern neighbours are at all in advance of ourselves. . . .

Whatever may be thought of the sufficiency of this [parochial] provision for the education of the people at the time it was made (a century and a half ago), considering the scantiness of the population and the poverty of the country at the time, there can be no doubt that it is far from being adequate to present wants, and that the country now has ample means for enlarging and improving it. . . . The provision for education in Scotland has by no means kept pace

<sup>1</sup> Among these were : *Digest of Parochial Returns made to the Select Committee appointed to Enquire into the Education of the Poor (Scotland)* (Parliamentary Papers, 1819, ix) ; *Answers to Queries from Sheriffs showing the State of Establishments for Parochial Education* (P.P., 1826, xviii) ; *Moral Statistics of the Highlands and Islands* (1826) ; *Report on Education in the Parochial Schools of the Counties of Aberdeen, Banff and Moray addressed to the Trustees of the Dick Bequest* (1835) ; *Report and Summary of Education Returns (Scotland), 1833-4* (P.P., 1837, v and vii) ; *Abstract of Answers made by Schoolmasters in Scotland to Queries circulated in 1838* (P.P., 1841, v).

with the increase in population, and the growing demand for knowledge among all ranks of the people. Many thousands, we fear, are growing up in some towns without any education whatever. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Hill also noted a development which was relatively little remarked upon by his Scottish contemporaries:

"The middle classes avail themselves of the parochial schools to some extent. But the generality, influenced partly by the desire to give their children a better education than can be there obtained, and yet more it is feared by a spirit of exclusion, send their children to private schools."<sup>2</sup>

In short, the national schools were not really, and were becoming even less, effectively national. They had clearly become deficient in numbers and they were also (though not universally) so deficient in quality that important sections of the community were avoiding them in favour of schools which were thought to be educationally and socially more attractive. Meanwhile, George Lewis, who was then secretary to the Glasgow Educational Society, had been at pains to underline for his fellow Scots the national significance of making improvements in the school system, and—typical of the Evangelical group of which he was a prominent member—to relate the decay and stagnation of that system to the languor which he saw affecting the church at large :

"The re-edification of the schools of Scotland is a work which should go hand in hand with the re-edification of the Church itself : and by anticipating the Government in both, we shall best secure the assistance of Government in behalf of both. These are the true Scottish questions : and for effecting these objects all parties in the Church may unite their strength. In all but our parochial churches and parochial schools we have lost our nationality. In these alone we survive as a nation—stand apart from and are superior to England. These are the only remains we can show the stranger of the ancient excellence of our country—the only memorials of the wisdom and worth of bygone days. These are the only institutions around which linger Scottish feelings and attachments : in the support, extension and improvement of which may yet be rallied all the patriotism and piety of Scotland."<sup>3</sup>

Little had been accomplished, however, towards the extending and improving of Scottish schooling by 1843 when the Disruption took place :

<sup>1</sup> *National Education : its present state and prospects* (1836), vol. i, pp. 284-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> *Scotland a Half Educated Nation both in the Quantity and Quality of her Educational Institutions* (1834), p. 75.

the question was still largely unresolved.<sup>1</sup> But in the enthusiasm which surrounded the founding of the Free Church, the Evangelicals did not forget their interest in education. Indeed, as it happened, they could not ; for a number of parochial schoolmasters who declared their allegiance to the new secession were forced to resign their livings, as were Free Church masters of endowed schools whose trustees represented the interests of the Established Church, and S.P.C.K. schoolteachers who were known supporters of the new church.<sup>2</sup> In the dismissal of these Free Church teachers we find the immediate occasion for the establishment of the Free Church Educational Scheme : it was not, however, the sole reason, as has usually been assumed. Nor was it, perhaps, in the long run the most important, since it does not explain why the Scheme grew to the proportions that it did. To obtain an explanation of this we must turn rather to the militancy and aggressiveness of a large section of the membership of the new Church : thus while Chalmers in 1843, in speaking about the educational problem, contented himself with the statement that the Free Church had a duty to provide teaching for the dismissed masters,<sup>3</sup> the more militant Candlish was already claiming that, in his view, its duty was to care for the education of the children of all those who had joined it and not to " throw the education of our youth into the hands of those whose principles we have condemned."<sup>4</sup> There was universal concern to support the teachers who had been dispossessed, but there was no such concerted agreement on the question of whether or not the new church had an educational liability which went beyond providing for their support. What Hugh Miller and others were later to call the " battle of the schools " was apparent from the very beginning in May 1843 : not only a battle between the Established Church and the Free Church, but also one fought within the Free Church itself.

The report of the Education Committee to the first Free Church Assembly showed the existence of a quite distinct division of opinion. It was there stated that, while there had been unanimous approval in the committee for the proposal to set up separate theological colleges, some members thought " that the Church should limit its attention to theological training . . . without attempting the foundation of universities, or

<sup>1</sup> The only and not very notable advance was in 1838 when so-called " parliamentary " schools were financed by the Treasury in *quoad sacra* parishes.

<sup>2</sup> It was reported in October, 1843, that 80 parochial schoolmasters had been ousted, as also 57 teachers of Assembly schools (which were administered by the Education Committee of the Established Church) and 27 S.P.C.K. teachers : 196 teachers of private schools were also said to have been expelled. (*Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, October, 1843, p. 78 note.)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1843, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



the establishment of grammar or elementary schools to any considerable extent or, at all events, upon a national system."<sup>1</sup> In support of its views, this latter group made two main points: firstly, that there would be difficulty enough in raising money for the founding of churches, without adding the establishment of an extensive school system to their financial commitments; secondly, that the parochial and burgh schools already established were organised on such an agreeable footing (i.e., with religious teaching based on the Bible and Shorter Catechism) that the children of Free Church parents might attend the ordinary schools and all but the theology classes at the universities. Neither point was acceptable to the majority of the committee, who concluded that "a much more extended scale of operations should be held in contemplation" and added:

"The difficulty of raising funds is not for a moment to interfere with our plan of proceeding. . . . If a good cause is shown why there should be a new system of education in all its branches, there is no reason to doubt that the people of Scotland will enable the Church to carry on her plans into execution. . . . The functions of any Church, and especially of a Church that aspires to the character of national, cannot be considered as completely fulfilled till provision is made for the religious training of the children and young persons connected with it, from the lowest elementary school to the first institutions of science and learning. And this view is strengthened . . . by the consideration that, having given a shock to the existing religious and educational establishments, by withdrawing ourselves from them, we are bound to furnish Scotland an equivalent. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The conclusions of this majority in the committee were enthusiastically acclaimed by the Assembly, whose members seem to have regarded themselves as the leaders of a new reformation, and as having been given the task of forming a new *national* communion at least equivalent to the old (while they looked forward to the time when the Established Church might in any case be reduced to the merest remnant). It was therefore highly unlikely that the body of Free Churchmen in Assembly would agree to sharing the existing national schools with the Established Church, and certainly not on the Established Church's terms. This was to be underlined during the next Assembly (October 1843) when a resolution was agreed that "from the stringency of the law subjecting parochial teachers in their office to the control of presbyteries [i.e., of the Church established by law], we as a Free Church are for ever separated from the endowed schools of the land, as well as all teachers maintaining our principles";<sup>3</sup> and it was also

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, May 1843, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, October 1843, p. 79.

"hoped that the Assembly would never rest from their labours till by the side of every Free Church there was planted a Free Church school."<sup>1</sup>

This attempt to demonstrate, through its educational provision, the national character of the new church was a very important consideration in the organisation of the Educational Scheme. In October 1843 a subscription scheme was launched for the establishment of 500 congregational schools, and by 1844 just over £50,000 (the sum judged necessary for their building) had been promised and soon afterwards the total reached £60,000. At the news, the Assembly of 1844 was encouraged to look beyond the establishment of congregational schools and to revive an older concern for the inadequately provided masses in the towns and in the Highlands: "And should we, as a missionary church, in our educational as well as in our more purely evangelical labours, extend (as in duty called) our schools beyond our own congregations to the unoccupied and neglected districts of our land, a thousand teachers were nearer to the number we should calculate upon, than the small number of 600."<sup>2</sup> In 1844, indeed, the spirit of the Assembly was unboundedly high, for so considerable were the sums promised for all causes that the feeling was abroad that the congregations would underwrite to excess a ministers' sustentation fund, a church building fund, home and foreign missions, an educational scheme, or anything else that appeared both worthy and beneficial to the church.

In the Assemblies of 1845 and 1846, however, the tone of the Education Committee's reports and of the speeches in debate was very much subdued (with the notable exception of Candlish's, it should be said). The promises which had been made in support of the school-building fund were not being fulfilled, while the sums raised from the annual collections in church in aid of the Educational Scheme, from which salaries were paid, were not sufficient even to meet the cost of the commitments which the Education Committee had already entered into.<sup>3</sup> The expenditure on the Normal Training Schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh was greater than had been anticipated and was proving a severe drain on already strained resources. Meanwhile the salaries offered to the ejected schoolmasters were still, and would have to remain, lower than those available to them before the Disruption; and in some instances teachers were not being given stated salaries at all but were receiving only small gratuities. It was feared that, in these circumstances, masters would be forced to leave schools connected with the Free Church Scheme unless something were done quickly. That the rival Established Church might be able to take advantage of the situation was also frequently observed:

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, October 1843, p. 82.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1844, p. 169.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, May-June 1846, p. 180.

"There is good reason to think that many of the landed proprietors have been cherishing the idea that, though a large proportion of the adult population had left the Establishment, and might possibly not return to it, yet that, by means of schools to be conducted in a proselytising spirit, the rising generation might be gained back to the Church which the parents had forsaken. This has led them to refuse sites for schools, even where they have found it necessary to grant sites for churches. . . . There is reason to fear that it is with a similar view and in order to promote the same object, that the Government have apparently resolved to increase the salaries of the parochial teachers."<sup>1</sup>

The affairs of the Educational Scheme were at a point of crisis, and the occasion was taken to re-energise the Education Committee. Dr. Cunningham, who had held the office of convener in 1845 and 1846 resigned in favour of Candlish who, it was thought, would save the Scheme if anyone could. Irrepressibly optimistic as ever, Candlish had—even in 1845—seemed wholly untroubled by the stringent finances of the Scheme;<sup>2</sup> he had spoken blandly of the committee's need to raise £20,000 to £25,000 per annum in order to increase the number of schools and to raise the level of teachers' salaries; more than that, he had spoken then, as he did later, in the firm belief that the necessary sum would be obtained if only a satisfactory approach were made to kirk sessions, deacons' courts and the congregations. His first education report, to the Assembly of 1847, marked in its brusqueness, vitality and vision the change of convener. Almost the whole substance of the report was concerned with the raising of teachers' salaries and the possibility of their being further augmented after examination, all in the effort to raise the standard of teaching in Free Church schools and thus to make them effective rivals to the parochial schools: and Candlish was concerned to stress that the Scheme was a national enterprise of the first importance, a matter of patriotic as well as Christian endeavour on the part of a reborn and truly national church.<sup>3</sup> Yet the greater enthusiasm and vitality of the 1847 report and of that year's educational debate were not due alone to Candlish, for—as was to appear—he had become convener at an opportune moment. In December 1846 the Privy Council Committee on Education extended the system of grants

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, May-June 1845, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240: "Nothing short of the plan of our reforming forefathers, nothing short of the plan propounded by John Knox, ought to satisfy the Church in her present exigencies and with the opportunity she possesses."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1847, pp. 150 *et seq.* See also *Free Church Educational Journal*, May 1848, i, pt. 3.



to aid in the building of schools to religious denominations other than the Established Church, and after a lengthy discussion the 1847 Assembly, on the recommendation of Candlish, approved their acceptance.<sup>1</sup>

There was, however, a vexing problem here—while the grants-in-aid were to be afforded to the Free Church's schools, the Privy Council also insisted that they should be available on the same terms to Roman Catholic or any other denominational schools. Opposition to the acceptance of the grants arose from three quarters. Firstly, there was that more extreme party within the Church which maintained that its purity would be sullied by entering into any terms with a government which had not admitted the Disruption principles; but the 1847 Assembly overwhelmingly defeated a motion calling for the rejection of the grants on those grounds. Secondly, a larger group objected to the acceptance of aid if in so doing the Free Church allowed the right of the state to offer similar grants to Roman

<sup>1</sup> Before December 1846 the Privy Council gave aid only in what it considered to be "special circumstances" to schools other than those connected with the established churches. The Scottish Disruption did not, however, seem to constitute a sufficiently special circumstance. When towards the end of 1843 the Privy Council received an application for a building grant from a body called the Edinburgh Northern District Schools Board, it instructed the Scottish H.M.I. to find out what he could about the Board and its school. He reported that it was a multi-denominational organisation which was forming a school around two teachers newly dismissed for their adherence to the Free Church. Kay-Shuttleworth, the secretary to the Privy Council Committee, thereupon refused a grant on the grounds that the school was in connection with the Free Church. He quickly received an irate reply from Edinburgh, pointing out that the school was not so connected and was intended to be "divested of all appearance of sectarianism"; but the writer stated that his Board would, in order to be given a grant, so long as there was no interference with its proposed constitution, connect itself with either of the two educational societies which Kay-Shuttleworth had mentioned in his letter. In January 1844, however, the trustees of the Edinburgh school discovered that one of the societies, the British and Foreign Schools Society, would adopt their school only if the Shorter Catechism was withdrawn from use, while the other, the National Society, was an Anglican body and would accept the school only if the Catechism was withdrawn and religious instruction was based on Anglican forms. The secretary to the Edinburgh Board complained to the Privy Council about the anomalous situation whereby they could get a grant if they agreed to abandon the Catechism (which they would not do) but if they retained the Catechism they could only be given a grant by establishing a connection with the Church of Scotland which they had just left: the complaint had no effect. It is intriguing to notice that the Edinburgh Northern Districts school was allocated a grant in 1848, under the Minutes of December 1846, as a school in connection with the Free Church: one wonders how many other boards of trustees might have given a hesitant allegiance to the Free Church merely because they were unable to obtain a grant in any other way. (Parliamentary Papers, 1844, xlii).

Another series of letters, concerning an application for a grant for a Free Church school in Tain in 1850, show the Privy Council Committee's continuing lack of awareness of the educational as well as the religious consequences of the Disruption (*Ibid.*, 1852, xxxix).

Catholic schools and thus permitted public money to be used for the dissemination of the untruths of that faith ;<sup>1</sup> but Candlish and other speakers were given wide support for their view that the furtherance of the Educational Scheme would be immensely helped by the grants-in-aid and that the Church should accept them but also put great pressure on the government to distinguish more adequately between the supporting of truth and the sustaining of error.

A third group would not allow the matter to rest there. Thomas Guthrie, James Begg, Hugh Miller and William Gunn were among the many prominent Free Churchmen in whom the Assembly's acceptance of the Privy Council's proposals provoked a resurgence of earlier doubts about the outcome of the progressive extension of the Educational Scheme ; for they believed it was likely to turn aside interest and effort from the movement to promote a truly national system of education. Above all they feared that the acceptance of government money under the terms offered, that is, the granting of aid to the Church *as a sect*, would emphasise and exacerbate sectarian prejudices in education in a way that was quite foreign to the Scottish experience. Dismayed as these men were at the manner in which the Established Church seemed determined to maintain its legal hold over appointments to and the supervision of the parochial schools, they were nonetheless concerned that nothing should intensify a sectarian attitude to those once national institutions. They abhorred any development which would make less likely or possible the building up again of a system of schools which would serve the whole nation. They did not believe that there could be a genuine national system which did not start from and did not incorporate the old parochial establishment, and therefore had for long based their hopes on the eventual "opening up" of the masterships of the parish schools to churchmen of any of the presbyterian denominations. (If this happened then there would be no expectation that *every* Free Church would have a congregational school and more of the available funds might be used to extend educational provision among the scattered Highland population and in the expanding Lowland townships.) They distrusted any development which would cause the Established Church to become even more inflexible in this matter and anything which would divert the people of Scotland from pressing for the rehabilitation of the national heritage in education : and the introduction of the Privy

<sup>1</sup> There was no lack of opposition on this count from the United Presbyterians : see, for instance, *A Letter to the Rev. R. S. Candlish, D.D., on the Educational Question* (n.d.) by the Rev. Andrew Robertson of Stow.



Council grants-in-aid of denominational schools appeared likely to do both.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, about this time, it was customary for Free Churchmen in writing about education to call, as a matter of course, for the abolition of the religious test in the appointment of parochial schoolmasters (in so far, that is, as it was applied to presbyterians of the non-established communions), and in 1847 and 1848 Candlish did on occasion refer approvingly to this campaign and make his own plea for abolition. At the same time, in reaction to the arguments being brought forward against the extension of the Scheme under the Privy Council Minutes, he had begun to defend the fact of the existence of the Scheme, its character and its development, in the Church courts and in publications connected with the Church.<sup>2</sup> In his speeches and writings Candlish gave especial emphasis to the distinctive religious character of the teaching which he saw as marking off the schools within the Scheme. At all events, by 1849 Candlish appears to have concluded that the attention that was being given to the opening up of the parish schools would be better and more fruitfully paid to the Free Church's own educational concerns, and he disassociated himself from the campaign to break the hold of the Established Church over the parochial schools. As a result, the divergence of opinion on this matter within the Free Church was made clearer, and in the intense and at times quite acrimonious dispute which followed (in which the parties tended to range themselves behind Begg on the one hand and Candlish on the other) the efficacy of the Educational Scheme itself was brought into question.

When the topic of national education was debated in the Free Presbytery of Edinburgh early in 1849 Candlish was reported as saying :

" he did not think that their primary and paramount duty, as a church, was to agitate for a reformation of the parochial schools any more than to agitate for a reformation of the parish churches. The primary and paramount duty of the Free Church in the matter of education was to provide the means of education, as far as was in their power,

<sup>1</sup> In September 1846, Guthrie wrote about Candlish's ideas to promote and extend the Educational Scheme to Fox Maule and explained that he was " confident that his [Candlish's] scheme won't succeed and convinced, moreover, that it should not." Guthrie seems to have been particularly distressed at the invitation offered by the Minutes of December 1846 for a more emphatic sectarianism in education. (*Autobiography and Memoir of Thomas Guthrie, D.D.* (1875), vol. ii, pp. 287-97). For the others' views, see especially: James Begg, *National Education for Scotland Practically Considered* (2nd ed., 1850); Hugh Miller, *Thoughts on the Educational Question* (1850); and reports of Gunn's speeches in the Free Presbytery of Edinburgh in *Free Church Educational Journal* (April and May, 1849), i, pts. 10 and 11.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in *Free Church Educational Journal* (October 1848), i, pt. 8.

to their own adhering people and to all who would receive it at their hands. . . . He thought that no national system of education would be worth contending for, which did not contemplate as its ultimate result the swallowing up into one great institute . . . all the schools established in Scotland, upon right and sound principles, and which did not contemplate the establishment of a scheme commensurate with the present population and wants of Scotland—wants which the mere opening up of the parish schools would not meet. . . . He said he always felt a very great responsibility in approaching the subject of opening up the parish schools and universities, lest he should find that he had lent his help to a movement which might issue in a very disastrous state of things—he meant by that which would simply effect the removal of the existing tests, leaving the management of the schools in other hands than that of the heritors and doing nothing in having a security in reference to the religious character of the education to be given. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Begg and his party were here opposed to Candlish on almost every point. For one thing, Candlish seemed to them too much to assume that the parochial schools would remain in the province of the Established Church: they accepted that the Disruption had settled the state of the churches in Scotland but not that it had necessarily settled the state of the national schools. And while Candlish suggested that it was idle to fuss over the opening up of the parish schools because this alone would not satisfy the educational wants of Scotland, they were at pains to show that Scotland needed more, and more strategically placed, schools than were being provided (or in their view would and could be provided) by the separatist efforts of *all* the churches; furthermore, they were convinced that the only feasible way in the current circumstances to achieve a worthwhile national system was to enlist government support for a non-sectarian, but not non-religious, system which would grow from the opened-up parochial schools. For them Candlish’s concern to extend the Educational Scheme while he waited for the erection of an acceptable national system was misconceived, since they believed that such a national system would be delayed and probably blocked by the existence of a strong sectarian school establishment under the aegis of the Free Church. Begg, for one, felt that nothing would be achieved unless there was action of a much more positive kind than waiting; and he wanted the Free Church to offer the government the 600-700 schools attached in one way or another to the Educational Scheme as part of a ready-made new national system; only, however, on the secure promise that the parochial schools would also

<sup>1</sup> *Free Church Educational Journal* (May 1849), i, pt. 11.

be handed over and opened up to teachers of all Protestant denominations. As to the problem of the administration of the new national schools, they in no way shared Candlish's cautiousness; they proposed that the immediate management of the schools should rest simply in the hands of elected representatives of the parish or locality. The prospect of such an administrative arrangement made Candlish very apprehensive about maintaining the religious character of the schools and of their teachers (he often at this time bemoaned the latitudinarian tendencies of the age) but Begg and Guthrie both said that they could trust the good sense in these matters of the elected representatives, who would—because of the religious training they had themselves received in church and school—insist on and secure teaching of a religious character that none could disapprove. It also seemed immaterial to them, on balance, that the majority on a board of management might be members of the Established Church, for these men no less than the Free Church representatives would demand the use of the Bible and the Shorter Catechism in the school, and this was all the security that was required—an opinion which Candlish assuredly did not hold.

The major educational debate in the 1850 Assembly provided the opportunity for both sides to state a formal case to their fellow Churchmen. Begg outlined his (by then well-known) proposals for a national system; emphasised the necessity for the Church "to move with decided energy in this matter" and not to reckon "its duty complete when it recorded certain resolutions and proceeded to promote education in its own way"; and pleaded that the Church should look beyond its self-satisfaction with its Educational Scheme to what still remained to be done in the way of school provision throughout Scotland and also to how best, in practical terms and without unwarranted attachment to its own schools, a worthy national provision might be achieved.<sup>1</sup> Candlish in reply laid great emphasis on the Church's enormous achievements in education and on the importance of maintaining its control of the schools so as to secure in them the best kind of religious teaching, and in so doing roused the Assembly to an overwhelming burst of corporate pride in its Educational Scheme. Where Begg's speech was well received, Candlish's was punctuated by demonstrations of enormous enthusiasm. In the event, the outcome of the debate was disastrous to Begg's party. When the Assembly was finally asked to declare whether it wished to prosecute its Educational Scheme "with increasing energy" and to take "advantage of such aid as the Government may be disposed to give", Candlish won a striking victory by 254 votes to 16.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1850, pp. 208-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.



It is hard to believe that this result—with regard to the size of the majority, that is—in fact represented the reasoned opinion of the membership of the Assembly and was not, to an unknown extent, rather a response to the personalities involved and a reflection of their oratorical powers. But if the magnitude of the defeat was perhaps, in some measure, a personal rebuff to Begg and his allies, it had also more far-reaching consequences. It is possible to discern in pamphlets and newspapers in 1850 and after a more widely-held impression that Candlish—and with him, demonstrably, the vast majority of Free Churchmen—were now firmly opposed to the movement towards national education.<sup>1</sup> And Gunn, who resigned after the 1850 debate from the Free Church Education Committee, clearly suggested that this was so in his published letter of resignation:

"I cannot help regarding as most unfortunate this substitution of a system, which all men but ourselves will hold and call sectarian, in place of a great national institute. It diverts the mind of the people from the only effectual remedy. If the local sore is healed, the general disease is unheeded. It does more and worse—each movement that our Scheme makes in advance, each school that it plants—will but throw fresh obstacles in the way of a national movement for this truly national object. . . . I believe that the Scheme now presents and is actually intended by many of its most active supporters to present, a barrier to the supply of this country's greatest want."<sup>2</sup>

There was much bitterness in the comments of the defeated party. They so believed in the correctness of their cause, as did Candlish and his supporters in theirs, that they could not easily comprehend a standpoint from which others could deny it. Both sides believed that theirs was the best means of achieving an acceptable solution and supported their beliefs honestly and with understandable single-mindedness. The parties seem, above all, to have been divided in their attitudes to national education, not over the question of whether a national system was *ipso facto* good or

<sup>1</sup> For example, in the very forthright *An Appeal for Scotland to the Parliament of 1851, or What Should Lord John Russell Do?* (1850, pp. 10-11), where the author states that "the divine in the Free Church most conspicuous against National Education is Dr. Candlish."

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *National Education—The Gunn Dinner Analysed and the Gunn Rejection Vindicated* by A Free Church Member (1851). A few months later Gunn was proposed by the Privy Council Committee as an inspector of non-established presbyterian schools, but the Free Church Education Committee vetoed his appointment.

Guthrie also resigned from the Education Committee and in a letter to Fox Maule about this time, commented: "The jealousies and bigotry and narrow-mindedness of many are sickening. These men are never without a pair of Free Church spectacles." (*Autobiography and Memoir of Thomas Guthrie, D.D.* (1875), vol. ii, pp. 288-90.)

bad, necessary or superfluous. Begg and his allies seem to have been more willing to risk something they recognised as good in the current educational situation in order to be sure of the opportunity for the national extension and improvement of schooling. Thus Candlish, for instance, was determined to maintain the close connection which existed between church and school, and if a scheme of national education, otherwise acceptable, might tend to disrupt this connection, then he opposed it—even if he were driven into an apparently convinced sectarianism in doing so : his opponents, and especially Guthrie, placed the achievement of a national system above all else, and considered that the close attachment of schools to churches ought to be broken because, without a single national church and with no prospect of one, there was bound to be obstruction to *any* scheme for school extension proposed by the Government.

Begg and his supporters had judged the years 1849-50 to be particularly favourable for prodding parliament into legislating for a new national system, so great and so general was public interest in Scotland at that time. By 1852, however, despite the still numerous meetings and publications in favour of national education, he thought that the opportunity had passed and that the public mind, had, by and large, gone to sleep on the matter. It is interesting that Begg appears to have regretted the defeat in the 1850 Assembly mainly because it might be taken to signify that not even the major part of the nation could be seen thereafter as campaigning for a national system, and that therefore the only important means of convincing the Government and the body of (mainly English) M.P.'s to act had been lost. This is an interesting contention which deserves attention and investigation. He seems, moreover, to have believed that parliament would, and not without reason, come to assume for Scotland the same kinds of denominational difficulties in the way of educational legislation as it recognised in England, and do nothing.<sup>1</sup> This is again a point which merits further study—for it is surely not without significance, other factors notwithstanding, that Scotland had to wait until 1872 (and until parliament had at long last legislated for English education) before a government bill to extend and improve Scottish schooling was eventually passed.

<sup>1</sup> Especially when Candlish told the 1851 Assembly that it was inexpedient to discuss "the *quaestio vexata*, the difficult question of a right national system of education" and that "their business rather was . . . to proceed as if there were nothing whatever on the *tapis* but only the great Educational Scheme to which this Church stood pledged. . . ." (*Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, May-June 1851, pp. 342-3.)

